

## HEALTH

## Long-term care residents would rather see loved ones than be safe from COVID-19, B.C. advocate says



By **Richard Zussman** • Global News

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A new report from the province's watchdog for seniors describes the plight of long-term care home residents during the COVID-19 pandemic as frustrating and even inhumane. Richard Zussman has more on Isobel Mackenzie's findings and her recommendations. – Nov 3, 2020



British Columbia's advocate for seniors is calling on the government to help people in long-term care and assisted living see more of their family members amid the [COVID-19 pandemic](#).

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On Tuesday, Isobel Mackenzie said she originally supported the province's move to lock down long-term care facilities and restrict visits to help curb the spread of the virus, but that she never expected the restrictions to be in place for nine months.



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She released results of a recent survey that suggests residents are now more worried about seeing their loved ones than they are about contracting COVID-19.

“It’s part of a larger conversation. What are we keeping them safe for, if it’s not for spending the precious time left with the ones they love?” Mackenzie said.

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“They would rather have COVID than never see their son, their daughter again.”

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Mackenzie called on the province to allow care-home residents to select an essential care partner — someone who is already in their bubble who can make more frequent, longer visits — as well as allow visits by family members who may have stopped more casually, such as once a week, before the pandemic.

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She said the government should build on its easing of visitation rules back in June, when it allowed one loved one or family member to visit each resident as the number of COVID-19 cases was dropping and the economy was beginning to reopen.

“We can ... recalibrate existing policies and practices to better meet the needs of those family members who serve as care partners and to provide the opportunity for additional family members to spend time with their loved ones,” she wrote in her report.

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“Residents have told us that contracting [COVID-19](#) is not their biggest fear. We need to listen to and respect their voices. Residents have not surrendered their right of agency because they live in (long-term care or assisted living).”

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Her report outlined many stories detailing the negative impact that few to no visits has had on some residents, with some of them, and their family members, expressing more fear about loneliness than contracting the disease.

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“Visitor restrictions have had a terrible impact on my life,” read a statement from a 94-year-old veteran who broke a hip back in March.

“The doctor decided I couldn’t go (to) the hospital even for an X-ray. If my family could have visited to help me with that decision, I would have had an operation by now instead of being stuck forever in this lodge in a wheelchair.”

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The survey also found that some family members do visit their loved ones in long-term care frequently, and in the privacy of the residents' rooms, but that most are heavily limited.

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Some residents only had one person visit them prior to the pandemic, while others receive no visits at all now because their family lives far away or are not involved in their lives.

“The large majority of respondents – both residents and families – reported that the current visitor restrictions are not working for them and some referred to them as inhumane,” Mackenzie said.

“They want to be able to visit in their own rooms, they want to be able to touch their loved ones. Many expressed interest in expanding the visits to more than one person.”

The report recommended balancing the risk of transmitting COVID-19 with the risk of effects due to long-term separation from family, when determining the number of visitors that should be allowed at each facility.

Mackenzie also called for the creation of a provincial association of long-term care and assisted living resident and family councils.

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